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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 000859

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [GOI](#) [EXTERNAL](#) [ISRAELI](#) [PALESTINIAN](#) [AFFAIRS](#)

SUBJECT: SPIEGEL DISCUSSES CROSSINGS, GOI'S HAMAS POLICY, BARRIER, AND ROADBLOCKS WITH DIBBLE

REF: TEL AVIV 773

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary: Brigadier General (ret.) Baruch Spiegel on February 24 gave Deputy Assistant Secretary Liz Dibble and the Ambassador an update on the status of the crossings in Gaza. Karni and Sufa are both closed, Erez is open, and Kerem Shalom has "big potential but zero activity," according to Spiegel. He commented that there is no one to talk to on the Palestinian side, particularly with respect to the operations at Rafah, and that Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmud Abbas should take responsibility for the passage. Spiegel said that the GOI is currently determining how to deal with a Hamas-led government and that "it's a work in progress." He said that this lack of policy makes it difficult to deal with day-to-day issues, and coordination on the ground. He also noted that the GOI is prioritizing projects for water and wastewater treatment, among others, because stopping these types of projects that also affect Israel could result in even bigger problems in one or two years. Spiegel mentioned that the separation barrier is about 50 percent complete, but that there is no work being done in the Ma'ale Adumim and Gush Etzion blocs due to pending legal issues. He reported that there are currently 349 obstacles to movement in the West Bank, according to IDF statistics, and that the IDF still wants to implement its plan to ease movement for Palestinians under the Agreement on Movement and Access when the security situation is calm. End summary.

2. (U) Spiegel was accompanied by Capt. Igal Ostanovsky, legal adviser in the IDF's Military Advocate General's Corps. The Ambassador and Dibble were accompanied by EconCouns, deskoff, and econoff (notetaker).

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Passages  
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3. (C) Brigadier General (ret.) Baruch Spiegel discussed the status of the passages in the Gaza Strip with Deputy Assistant Secretary Liz Dibble and the Ambassador on February 24. He told them that Karni is closed, and that the GOI continues to investigate a possible explosion in a tunnel on February 21. He said that Israel is not "100 percent sure" what happened, but that it was something "very wrong" nevertheless. He mentioned that the IDF had considered opening the crossing on February 24, but decided against it in the end. Spiegel commented that the GOI has found an additional 14 tunnels under the north-south IDF patrol road along the Gaza border, and that the GOI suspects these tunnels will be used to attack the other crossings. He said that the tunnels could also be used to transfer terrorist know-how to the West Bank if terrorists get out of Gaza through the tunnels.

4. (C) Spiegel reported that Erez is open, but that it could be closed depending on the threat level. He said Sufa, the biggest crossing for aggregates, had been closed for eight or nine days due to a Qassam rocket attack, and because the workers on the Palestinian side refused to go through magnetometers. Spiegel said that Kerem Shalom still has "big potential but zero activity." He commented that vegetables could be exported through Kerem Shalom, but concluded that the Palestinians prefer for Karni to be closed without an alternative than to use Kerem Shalom at all. Spiegel mentioned that the Palestinians had tried to export vegetables through Rafah, but that the experiment was stopped after one truck. He said that the "clients went on strike" because they did not want to be checked by Palestinian security personnel. According to Spiegel, this makes it difficult for Palestinian customs officials to do their job, which is then compounded by the fact that there is a "lack of a responsible address" on the Palestinian side with whom to talk. He said that even EU/BAM Lt. Gen. Pistolese needs an address, but that it should not be Muhammad Dahlan. Spiegel opined that the passages should be under the authority of Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmud Abbas. He remarked that despite all the difficulties with the operations of the passages, the GOI has decided to continue to upgrade the crossings and to be strict with security.

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Still Working Out a Hamas Policy

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15. (C) In response to Dibble's question on how the GOI intends to coordinate with the new PA government on issues such as the crossings, Spiegel replied that the GOI is currently determining how to deal with a Hamas-led government and that "it's a work in progress." He said that the government is still checking its policy, and that this makes it difficult and frustrating to deal with day-to-day issues. He cited shipping containers in Ashdod destined for the Gaza Strip as an example. He explained that there are at least two containers full of grain paid for with Hamas money at the port, but that Israel has stopped them and put them into storage until it decides how to deal with them. EconCouns asked what the GOI would do with such containers when the PA, under a Hamas-led government, is importing the food, and Spiegel replied that the GOI would have to check the source of the money for the food. The Ambassador asked whether this meant that the PA will not be able to import anything under its own name, including items such as desks, and Spiegel conceded that this is a difficult question, and part of the policy that the GOI is trying to work out now. The Ambassador suggested that perhaps a better answer is to focus on the end-user, rather than on who is importing the goods because Hamas front companies can always conceal the source of the funds.

16. (C) Spiegel continued that this could be a period in which both the Israelis and Palestinians see how things should function because in the end, no one wants to see hunger or problems with hospitals. He said these problems are in no one's interest, and that scanners and "basic coordination without politics" could produce good results. He cited avian flu as an example, and said that if there is avian flu in Gaza, "something will have to be done" whether its money to provide shots or some other measure. He mentioned that there is currently a team comprised of Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, the MOD's legal advisor, and others, working on these day-to-day coordination issues. The Ambassador noted that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz told him on February 22 that permission for coordination on the ground between the GOI and Hamas elements would be given on a case-by-case basis by the cabinet (ref A). Spiegel agreed, and said that a situation in which avian flu could spread to Israel would be one of those situations.

17. (C) Dibble informed Spiegel that the USG is currently doing its own review of aid programs, and warned that there could be contradictions in what programs Israel wants to continue and what programs the USG can continue due to legal restrictions. She said that it is important for Spiegel and the GOI to continue to coordinate with USAID on these matters. Spiegel agreed, saying that it is important for the GOI to carefully check all of the aid programs to ensure that the aid is being channeled to the appropriate recipients, including aid given through UNRWA and the U.N. World Food Program. Dibble asked whether NGOs and other organizations would have the capability to deal with the distribution of an increased amount of aid, and Spiegel replied that it would be necessary to have a big donors' meeting to determine their capacity.

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The West Bank is More Complicated  
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18. (C) Spiegel said that coordination with Hamas in the West Bank would be even more complicated due to the integration of the IDF and Israeli settlers with the Palestinian population. He reported that, nevertheless, the crossing at Jalameh was seeing 80-100 trucks/day cross in both directions, and that Shaar Efrayim, after being privatized for three weeks, was seeing 140-150 trucks/day cross in both directions. He explained that the export of cucumbers from Jenin to a kibbutz in Israel for pickling had gone very well with only one scanner, and claimed that it will "go even better" when more scanners are installed. Spiegel acknowledged that Nablus was hurting economically because an ongoing IDF security operation there has kept the city fairly closed off. He said, "We have to keep security but make sure people are having their needs met." With respect to the crossing at Tarqumiya in the southern West Bank, Spiegel said he knew there had been work done as part of the Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA), but he did not know the current status.

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Separation Barrier Update  
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19. (C) In response to Dibble's question on the status of the separation barrier, Spiegel reported that the barrier is about 50 percent finished. He said it is complete in the north from the Jordan Valley to just south of Tel Aviv's latitude. He explained that the GOI is working on the finger tips of the Ariel bloc with a special security arrangement, but that they are not connected to the "palm" of the Ariel

bloc, and that the "palm" is not on the agenda. He commented that after the elections on March 28, there will be changes in the route of the barrier around Alfei Menashe settlement to move the barrier closer to the Green Line. Spiegel continued that there are remaining issues to be resolved around the Modi'in Illit bloc and Jerusalem, and mentioned that the recent decision to keep the Palestinian village of Beit Ikhsa out of the barrier was "interesting" because it would change the entire finger that stretches from the Green Line to just north of Bet Horon settlement. Spiegel said that there is nothing on the ground in the Ma'ale Adumim or Gush Etzion blocs because the route of the barrier is facing legal issues in both locations, and that the southern portion of the barrier should be complete in another six months.

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Obstacles to Movement  
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10. (C) The Ambassador asked about the current number of obstacles to movement in the West Bank, and Spiegel reported that there are 349 according to IDF statistics. He said that the IDF is continuing its technical discussions with OCHA, which is using a significantly higher estimate, because the IDF believes that Palestinians in the Hebron area set up some of their own roadblocks to prevent thieves from going into their lands (septel). Spiegel said that the IDF's new plan to ease movement in the West Bank is still valid, and that if "we resolve Nablus and find a calm security situation," the GOI will implement that plan. The Ambassador pointed out that the revised GOI plan to ease movement in the West Bank is more about circumventing, not removing, roadblocks, and is not what the AMA intended. Spiegel agreed. He said that perhaps "something better can be done," and that "we want to work to find something closer to the old plan." The Ambassador emphasized that static barriers do not contribute to Israel's security because terrorist can easily circumvent them once they know where the barriers are, and that we should focus on using technology whenever possible to enhance security while making Palestinian lives easier to reduce violence and enable negotiations. Again, Spiegel agreed.

11. (C) DAS Dibble has cleared this cable.

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JONES